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The Washington Scene

Geneva: Soviet Motivations

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Probably the biggest unplumbed secret at the Geneva summit conference is simply: What is the basic motivation of the Soviet "committee of rulers" which has come from Moscow to talk with the West?

Are the Soviet leaders acting only from economic and strategic compulsion — the farm crisis, the arms burden, and the sense of emergency created by the adherence of West Germany to NATO? Or are they genuinely concerned with calling quits to the cold war and engaging in a period of peaceful coexistence with the West?

Do they wish merely a slight easement of the arms burden for a limited period of years, or—being second-generation revolutionaries and interested in material advance rather than revolutionary ideology—have they suffered a change of heart?

It would be a fatuous Western diplomat who would proceed at Geneva solely on the "change of heart" premise. We, of course, discover Soviet Premier Nicolai A. Bulganin expressing such acceptable eve-of-conference sentiments as "let's prove in peaceful competition which system is right," a proposal which President Eisenhower has also launched. Mr. Bulganin has also suggested that a reduction in armaments would permit the building of "homes, schools, mills, factories, electric power stations," another of Mr. Eisenhower's familiar themes.

Premier Bulganin has been very correct and hopeful of

late. But the same Bulganin, when he assumed office, denounced what he called American aggression against Communist China and pledged the Soviet Union to stand by its Chinese ally. Has he had a change of heart since?

Or are the Soviet leaders mainly worried about those American air bases which ring the Soviet Union? And,



They Say I Should Relax

more precisely, are they not desperately concerned to see West Germany, which has the potential of becoming the third most powerful nation on earth, joining the Western system of alliances?

No one can render a precise answer concerning what touches the Soviet leaders the most deeply. It is a main purpose of the Geneva Conference to plumb the Soviet mentality, to assess how genuine are their professed desires to alleviate world tensions. It may well be that the Kremlin leaders are themselves in a transitional phase

and not sure of their ultimate goals.

The U.S.S.R. is at the moment a dictatorship without a dictator, an empire without an emperor. It is conducting a remarkable experiment in "collective" or group rule. Its chief officers are unable to enforce the same harsh discipline that Joseph Stalin wielded. They are coping with an emergent, demanding Communist China, with an arms burden which in these days of unconventional weapons and multimillion-dollar planes is almost unsupportable. And all this on an economy which hasn't an ounce of slack in it. Soviet policy may indeed be in a state of flux.

American planners for Geneva have, of course, had pretty fixed ideas about Soviet goals. They have concluded that the Soviet leaders wanted to ease up on the arms race for 8 or 10 years, so they might become strong in other ways. And that they wanted to get rid of our overseas air bases — by making peace so popular that the European countries owning the real estate where our bases were located would say, "Yankee, go home." The Soviet Union assuredly would like to neutralize Germany and Japan.

These are the hard-boiled Soviet aims. Yet President Eisenhower, while well aware of these purposes, has allowed himself to suggest hopefully that Geneva may change the whole spirit in which international conferences are conducted.

Why, then, is the President optimistic? Because, as he has said, the demand and hope for

peace, from peoples the world over, is bearing in on the Geneva Conference, and is a force affecting East as well as West.

Because, too, it is now certain that the Soviet rulers, who have exploded their own test H-bombs and witnessed the results, are thoroughly aware of the menace of atomic war to civilization—all civilization, including that of the Soviet Union.

And there is also hope in the very fact that the Geneva Conference is under way. If these were the uncompromising days of Stalin, the Big Four parley probably would not be happening at all.

Messrs. Khrushchev, Bulganin, Molotov, and Zhukov are quite probably acting from a mixture of compulsions and motivations. Beyond their domestic concern, and their serious worry at the revival of the German nation whose armies twice reached the gates of Moscow, perhaps there are some in Moscow (including former Premier Georgi M. Malenkov whose power is not wholly eclipsed) who fancy a try at genuine peaceful coexistence with the West.

Sir Winston Churchill, who started the whole business of a summit conference, has said that a "period of relaxed tensions" may be all we can expect in the way of present results. But what some observers are hoping is that, whatever the present mixed motives, if there is a 5- or 10-year relaxation of tensions, the Soviet rulers will thereafter find it either impossible, or beyond their wish, to "start up the revolution" again.